

Interview with Sam Sorenson

Choosing to attend Brigham Young University

I had an old trumpet. My dad had financed a band. He used to practice in the port of an old hotel. When they stopped the band he got the instruments back, but all he got was an old trumpet, a coronel I think it was, and the belt had been bent, I straighten that up and tried to learn how to play it. When I got to Springville, we didn't have enough money to buy a new trumpet, so the band leader in Springville, Clair Johnson, gave me a bass horn, and that is what I played. I got a sousaphone when I was a senior I think, or maybe a junior. We had band contests up in Price every year for the high school, and on my senior year I had won a contest, the solo contest on a sousaphone. I was all set for the next year to start college and I was also to go to the U, University of Utah, because the band leader up there had got me a job as a housekeeper/janitor for the Chi Omega sorority. It was something. You had to have a job to get through school in those days. About two weeks before school started, I was living in Springville, and Professor Robert Sauer, who had the band at BYU, came over to see me. We called him Bob Sauer, if I refer to Bob Sauer you know who it is. He said that he knew I had won the contest in sousaphone. He wanted me to come to BYU. I told him I had a commitment with Professor Hopkins to go to the U. He asked in his own German accent, Well why don't you come to the school that is so close to you? I said, well that's because I am already set to go to the University of Utah. He said, well what if I get you a scholarship? So he gave me a music scholarship for the first year, that's how I changed and came to BYU.

Experiences at Brigham Young University

In the fall of 1935 I entered at BYU. I commuted from Springville six miles away, in a pool with some other guys from Springville. Three of us in that pool took German, so we practiced our German on each other, riding back and forth to school. I got a job on the stage helping change scenery, for Dr. Pardoe and his wife Mrs. Pardoe. I would work on the stage and stay up late sometimes. I sometimes rode to school with Jackie Davis from Spanish Fork. He had one of the few cars that students had at BYU. It was an old Ford rumble seat. He would come and knock on my window in Springville at 7:00 a.m. or earlier, and we would come to BYU. In the evening he played in a dance band, and I would be working on the stage. He would come and pick me up in the College hall. It was right east of the fountain there, in the administration building, which now I think it is the library for the city, it was big and it was on the second deck. There a set of about six stairs came down from the college hall, and over on the other side, I think they called the education building and set of stairs came down this way, a set of six wide steps. The entrance came through from the south to the north, and as I went up to the steps to the first deck of college hall, there was little closet to the right, and that had been made into the stage hands place of studies, it was just barely big enough to hold a little desk of about three to four feet wide and a chair and a board in there. We called him the "Lion Tamer's Club," so I told people that I was a lion tamer. It started by Ernie Wilkinson; Ernest Wilkinson who was later President of BYU. He was a stage hand, so he started this club that was before my time of course. One evening I been working late on the stage and Blanche Broadhead Evans, whom am I later married, worked on costumes and she had been working on

these costumes or something until late, the doors on the college hall were locked and she couldn't get out. I was working on the stage and I would wait for Jackie Davis to come and pick me up after he was done playing. Well this night I was sitting in this little lion table waiting for Jackie, and Blanche came down the stairs and tried to get out, and we were locked in. Finally Jackie came down to find me, and he knock on the glass doors, and Blanche saw him and I saw him, and he went to find somebody to get us out.

The Professors

In 1936 I was getting so many extra curriculum activities from the band and also from the theatre arts and drama and speech department side. We would go on tours with the band to several towns around Utah and Idaho mostly, and the same thing with the speech department. I decided I would change my major from music to speech and drama. I just had to drop out of the band. I couldn't do both of them, sometimes they would be traveling somewhere and doing something at the same time. So I more or less dropped the band, but I stayed in the course. The course was at that time a man course, conducted by the Madsens. The Madsens had a little different philosophy on how we were supposed to breath then the Pardoes did. The Pardoes wanted you to breathe through your diaphragm down here. Keep your chest up and breathe through your diaphragm. The Madsens wanted you to go through your chest, so your chest would be going up and down, and the Pardoes didn't like that. I had to learn both, but mostly I breathe in the diaphragm, so I think I still do, to a certain extent, I have a habit of doing that. The Pardoes were great, they had a different style of teaching than the others did, and even the Pardoes different among them, between them. Dr. Pardoe would be very not structure at all the way he taught. He would jump in and ask you a lot of questions, say get acquainted with all these books, do this and that. If you were in a play though, he was a very good director, but he would come in and say, Mr. Sorensen who were the three gracious? One, two, three, four, five, six... ten, oh you don't know that hum? You better learn these things. Read all about the Golden Bowl, anyway that book was about Greek and Roman, most Greek mythology, so we were suppose to know all the gods and the plays of Euripides, Escalus. Who is the other one? One was the comedian, wrote comedies, Aristophanes I guess were the three famous Greek playwrights. We were supposed just to read that on our own and know something about everything that was Dr. Pardoes idea. He actually got his doctor while I was here, he went down to Louisiana to a University down there I am not sure which one. As a director he was very good though, because he would sit down there in the audience and tell you what to do. For instance in "Night Over Taos" I just had a minor part, I was Don McGill, there were two other Dons. We would line up, and he would say, don't stand there you look like the three gracious standing in a role. You got to stand in different places. That's the way he would direct, he a very good drama sense. He just knew what to tell you what to do to get the character right. Mrs. Pardoe style of teaching was different than Dr. Pardoes, she was much more structured, and she would look at details and give you specific assignments and talked about specific subjects, tailed it in more in a logical progression. The other thing they did was to give a private lesson. When you were a junior, you were supposed to read a play that meant that you would do all the characters yourself. Both of the Pardoes had studied back east, a school that I believe was run by Lila Powers, I am not positive about that name. It was in Martha's Vineyard of Massachusetts, a little island in Massachusetts. They have learned this technique of reading a play by

memorizing. You memorize all the parts and do all the characters. The way they would do that, girls when they read their play, would dress more or less in a formal dress like usually, so you didn't draw too much attention to your costumes. The boys would wear a tux when they read it finally. What you would do is cut the play somewhat. I took private lessons from Mrs. Pardoe, she gave me more attention, but Blanche liked Dr. Pardoe for some reason. Mrs. Pardoe would watch me and help me cut it shorter, and I happen to read "Journeys End." I have looked at a play, two or three others. One was called "Green Grow the Lilacs," which I think became "Carousel," it turned into a musical later on. Mrs. Pardoe as I said would give you more structured classes. She would give classes in drama, acting, get techniques of acting. Dr. Pardoe I think taught one too of techniques, but she would give you much more detailed and structured than he would, and give you certain assignments to read. They brought in specialists to teach, one of them was, her first name I don't remember now, but her last name was Stuart, and I took some classes from her. She was very good. I had two or three classes from Gerrit and I liked him very much, I think one was a German class, and everybody had to take a religion class, most of the professors also taught religion and Gerrit De Jong taught a religion class, I was in his class. He was great, as I recall he played the piano very well, he spoke several languages. He was a well build, pretty strong man, broad shoulders. I remember some kid really sassed him back and gave him a hard time in the hall once, and he grabbed the kid, shook him up, and scared the bajebeers out of him. I really liked Dean De Jong, he taught music too, I think he taught private piano. President Franklin S. Harris was a great man, as far as I can remember, he really laid the foundation for the expansion of the University. He had acquired land up here on the hill. There were only two or three buildings up here when I was here. One was the Major Memorial, and the other was Grant Library, and we had classes in both of those. I think when I was a freshman they just finished what they called the Brimhall Building, that was for mechanical arts, shop and stuff like that, what they taught over there. That's all the buildings that I actually remember that were here. We had to go from classes down in the lower campus, and had ten minutes to get to classes on the upper campus. You would walk up these steps. They had a little driveway that went around on your right, which would be going on the south side of the upper campus, going around towards the east. Down there, there was another set of stairs, if you would go around of the south side ways, you would have to climb up quite a few stairs to get up the hill. To the side of that, they had a cage where had the cougars, two cougars, there been a man named Porter who was an artist who painted those cougars. One of the professors was B. F. Larsen, those classes as I remember hard classes that he taught were over in the education building, down in the lower campus, which is the one I described to the west of the college hall. They had art classes up there, and they had a museum with dinosaurs up there. We would go up there and study among the dinosaurs, it was very quite sometimes. Larsen was up there. I remember one of two things he told us in his class, he would paint pictures of rocks and stones in the mountains, and tell us if you look these rocks and things, there is beauty in everything, and there is beauty in a cloud or rock if you paint it right. He also written plays and operas, and he wrote an opera called "Sun Dance" which they put on here.

Theater Plays

I have to tell you just a little bit about devotionals. It was three times a week, two of those devotionals were really religiously oriented, religious subjects, songs, mostly, speakers would be from the Twelve or

somebody would come down, or another good speaker like that. The third one would be just an assembly where we would have skits and programs for fun more or less for the student body. I remember participating on that two or three times. One time there was a girl here who was in the dance department, she was also a live wire, she could do anything, and willing to do anything, really quite a pretty girl, and she was from Idaho. She had a real sense of humor, laughing and very happy, well she and I did a skit, I remember, that we wrote, just a comedy. Probably drive from a radio show or something. We would have exchange programs with other universities on these meetings. I remember one from AC (Agricultural College) in Logan, they came down here and put on a program for us, and we went up there and put on one for them. Once in their program they said, "Well there is only one bad thing between the Agricultural College and BYU, and that is the University of Utah." The rivalry was already there between both of us. Anyway we had those, and we put on skits and things like that. In 1941 I did a little graduate work here, or maybe 1940. I graduate from undergrad in 1938 and Stan Watson was in my class, who became a coach. Some of the plays I was in that have come to my mind were, "Night Over Taos," minor part, "The Bishop Misbehaves," I had the romantic lead in that, Christensen played the opposite, Gilbert Tallhearst played the bishop, who was an immature detective. There was a guy who stole the jewel from Maje, and the bishop is trying to figure out who stole the jewels. Anyway we are off to the side of the stage. This would have been in 1937 I guess. Verdi Pal was playing the robbers they are suppose to catch him, then he runs off, and I am suppose to shoot, while we practice you know, we didn't have any blanks in this gun until the dress rehearsal. During the dress rehearsal they put blanks on it, as he ran off stage. I am supposed to shoot off stage. I am holding a gun down to the floor. I shoot about twice, up to three times, and every time I got it kicked up higher until I shoot him in the butt. He was dancing around and running up the stairs and said it was like salt and pepper. I was in "The Bishop Misbehaves," playing the second lead, the romantic lead. I played the lead in "Taming of the Shrew," Petruchio. In "Comedy of Errors," I had a major part in that. Major part in "A Midsummer Night's Dream." I was Master Ford in that. I was in Epton's Paragant. I was the understudy for Peer who was Lyman Hartman. I think he was a senior that year, and I was a junior, no I was either a freshman or sophomore that year. I played this German, Mr. Abercopf.

Anyway we are sitting there in this tropical island, with Peer and making some kind of deal with him... he was really rich by this time. It was I and another business man. We had a ship off the shore, and we are looking at the ship and it cut out a little cardboard about so high and put waves in the back of the stage. One of my lines was about the ship, I look out and point to the ship and say, "there she is, she is taking off at a terrific pace," someone was pulling it on a string, pulling it very slow, so it looks like it is sailing off. As I said at a terrific pace, it got stuck and all of the sudden it jerked and the ship jumped off the stage. I remember that! I was also the understudy for Pear, but he never got sick and I didn't get a chance. But I did memorize it. Let me tell you a little bit about the plays. They were all put on in college hall. We had a stage manager named Ariel Davis, very funny guy, he was just a permanent fixture at BYU, when I came and when I left. He was sort of an electrical genius, but he didn't care about how he dressed. He did all the stage and he fixed up some very fancy lighting. From the ceiling he had a little gondola that came down about the middle of the ceiling of college hall, we had spot lights in there, and I got to operate the spotlights when I was in the plays. I was a stage hand at that time, so I put up the sets. In the "Taming of the Shrew" for example, Pardoe put Ariel in the play, and he was supposed to be

one of my servants when Petruchio goes back to his home in Verona. Ariel had a trailer he lived in and he had cooked up a big ham actually, which he was going to save and eat afterwards. We come to this part in the play and he comes in with his ham and shows it to me and one of the cooks and I say that will never do, and I toss the ham to him and he drops it, and it falls all over the stage. Anyway, that's the way of a lot of what he did.

He was really an electrical genius, and fixed up dimmers set up in the back where we had our control clear up in the top of college hall. We had spot lights over there, and controls and light controls. He had a really sophisticated light panel back there where you could control the lights very well. He later got to be very rich because he had a lighting company, making lights for Broadway in every play.

The community supported him very much. It was the theater in Provo. In "Taming of the Shrew" for instance once, I remember, I just didn't get my line quite right, in the same type of scene where Ariel Davis was in that I was telling you, Clifton Black was the tailor and he comes in wearing these hats, these caps and this dress. The tailor shows the hats and I say, that's a bauble like a hat, and throw that away. then finally the next speech was about the tailor and the gal, and I was just blank on that for a minute or second and then it came to me. I got a cue from the side, and I was supposed to talk about the gal and say I tailor that gal. Anyway I said, it came to me quickly and I just said, yea tailor that gal. I never heard the end of it from the Pardoes.

I remember doing one night play for the mental institute up here that was the best audience I ever had. I grew up there, and read this one night play was kind of comedy, but they really responded to it. We would go other places. We would go to all the high schools around and plays. Some of the girls I knew later on, they saw me in these plays in their home town.

Final Thoughts on Brigham Young University

Well, being alumnus of BYU means a lot to me. I came back after World War II and did a lot of graduate here, worked here and found my wife. I have been out in South Pacific and hardly saw a white woman, at least for over two years. I came back here. I went to reunions after, saw some of my class members off and on. They gradually dwindled out until there was very few of us left from my class, however we knew, everybody knew, at least half of the rest of the student body. I knew most of them. Most of them knew me, because I have been in plays.

I was known around town pretty well. We traveled with these plays, so I got to know people all over the state, and people knew me, along with some of the other speech majors because we were in these plays, we did these one act plays we memorized. When I first got here, after a month I was so glad I didn't go to the University of Utah, because having moved to Springville when I was just in junior high there, I guess. As I said before, it was just a contractor town, and my dad didn't have any stages there, he had been mayor and one of the founding fathers, fathers of Delta.

When I came to BYU that really was something, especially after I got into plays. What kind surprised me a little bit was all these people from Salt Lake and Ogden, and the girls all it is like starting all over again, and I began to feel like was really somebody, after I was in plays and bands and things like that. Of

course some of the girls that didn't think as much of me in Springville, when I got here they thought I was being a little snooty with them because I didn't them out all the time or something. At BYU, I really came into my own, and got to be somebody here, and I really loved it, we had a great spirit here. I remember they take you on the freshman tours of the campus and ring the old white bell for you. I memorized that song, "Good will to the youth, and search of truth. You are welcome here." The bell would ring and so forth. We felt that with everybody, and we were just friends for life, if you had been at BYU. I never had that feeling in any other university

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